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THE VEILED IDENTITY: HIJABISTAS, INSTAGRAM AND BRANDING IN THE ONLINE
ISLAMIC FASHION INDUSTRY

By

KELSEY WANINGER

Under the Direction of Amira Jarmakani, PhD

ABSTRACT

What it means to be a Muslim woman is frequently redefined in reaction to the notions of ‘Muslim womanhood’ constructed within neoliberal society. By examining the ways in which Hijabi fashion bloggers use the visual discourse of their Instagram accounts to implement specific notions of taste, authenticity and branding this project aims to address the question of where fashion blogs fit within mainstream fashion frameworks and the ways in which the assumed tensions surrounding veiling and fashion are disrupted.

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Under the Direction of Amira Jarmakani, PhD

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Masters of Art

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Georgia State University

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Kelsey Waninger
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1 CHAPTER ONE: INTRODCUTION

1.1 Introduction

Preparing for their first issue release in early 2013, *Athnain* magazine held a cover photoshoot centered on the Kuwaiti/American fashion blogger and ‘turbanista’, Ascia, also known as Ascia A.K.F. Of the many shots featured throughout the debut, one of the photos sticks out in particular. Pitted against a solid color back drop, Ascia is clad in dark pants, a black silk, peplum blouse belted at the waist, and a dark-colored head-scarf fitted around her head and neck. Her features are accented with thick eyebrows, dramatic eye makeup and dark lipstick. Posing with her hands elegantly poised in the air, only her side-profile visible, she arches her back as she directs her gaze away from the camera, seemingly at some unseen distant object. The photo is filtered in black and white, adding drama to the contours of her face and clothes.

The lighting, styling, and composition all transform the image from a normal snapshot into a high fashion photograph. Flash forward a few months to another photo of Ascia, posted on her personal Instagram blog. Here, Ascia is standing in a railway car, holding her newborn child in a sling around her torso. Wearing skinny jeans rolled at the ankle, a loose coral blouse with a high collar and long sleeves, pale flats, sunglasses, a floral print turban and light jewelry, the Ascia in this photo is presenting her style in a very different way than the woman in the *Athnain* photo. Rather than the distant, seemingly inaccessible woman in high fashion garments, Ascia’s personal blog shows a woman who presents herself and her clothes as normal, manageable and ‘everyday.’

Both photos, however, are examples of how Ascia uses her varying tastes to incorporate modest apparel into modern fashion, an increasing trend among fashion bloggers. Ascia’s

modest style is heavily inspired by Islamic styles of dress, including the long-sleeve tunics and headwraps, Ascia's particular brand of veil being the turban. Traditional discourses of Islam, however, are often pitted against Western traditions of consumerism, making the modern fashion world seem at odds with the religion's moral codes. Given these tensions, Ascia and other fashion bloggers like her are assimilating into a new trend of religious marketing, coined the Islamic culture industry. According to a special issue of the *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies*, titled "Marketing Muslim Women," the Islamic culture industry is a "series of images, practices, knowledges, and commodities [that] are marketed specifically to Muslim women" (Gokariksel, McLarney 2010: 2). The role of women in this industry include writers, editors, models, designers, consumers and distributors. Yet one of the most popular and prolific roles in recent years is the blogger. Businesses and brands within online spaces that are created by and for Muslim women have flourished in the last decades (Gokariksel, McLarney 2010: 2), and a new area of expertise has arisen in this industry: the role of the 'modest fashionista,' or 'hijabista.' A 'hijabista' is a Muslim woman who dresses "stylishly" while still adhering to an array of "modest" apparel that coincides with Islamic dress codes. The hijabista is a woman who blends her taste and style to create a name for herself, branding the veil in a way that seems 'natural' to Islamic lifestyle.

What it means to be a Muslim woman is frequently defined and redefined by society in reaction to the notions of 'Muslim womanhood' constructed within a neoliberal context, specifically around visual codes. More specifically, the centrality of the veil within these visually constructed notions of 'Muslim womanhood' exemplifies the reification of classic orientalist stereotypes in which the hijab is seen as ugly and oppressive. The veil is often seen as a marker of subjectivity, and women's subjectivity within Islam is under constant scrutiny

(Pham, 2011; Britto and Amer, 2007; McCloud, 1996; Ghamari-Tabrizi, 2004). Within the Islamic culture industry, however, you see Muslim women navigating the market and online media in conjunction with their expressions of piety, creating an Islamic consumer culture that allows religious adherence to coincide with consumerism.

In the post 9/11 era, Muslim women's bodies are scrutinized in every possible way, both in Western and non-Western society. With the Islamic culture industry providing another way such scrutiny is made possible, the women involved (both consumers and producers) are often left navigating the boundaries between secular and religious modes of dress. Looking specifically at the online sector of this industry, I examine the ways in which the Islamic culture industry has produced an image of Muslim womanhood, particularly in the context of lifestyle and fashion, that is attractive and desirable; a woman who is able to maneuver her wardrobe to reflect her tastes, which fluctuate between every day settings (such as shopping, hanging out with friends, walking down the street, etc.) and high-profile events (parties, fashion week, proms, etc.). All the while, she is still giving the impression to her online followers that she is maintaining her religious piety, or remaining "authentic." Maintaining religious piety, in this context, refers to a mode of living that falls in line with Islamic religious codes concerning dress, outward appearance and lifestyle.

1.2 Research Questions

My early interest in this project led me from initially wanting to gather data through personal interviews to settling on content analysis through blogs, due to the limitations on time. This blog analysis, however, proved to be a crucial starting point to what will hopefully be future research; the blogs laid the foundation understanding the visual discourses within hijabi online spaces. I asked the questions: while there is no 'authentic' way of doing Islamic fashion, how

are the blogs pursuing and operating on an idea of ‘authenticity’ within hijabista culture? How do the Instagram accounts @ascia_akf, @yazthespaz89, @velascarves, @dalalid, and @phkidaily create visual discourses that frame a particular notion of Muslim womanhood and fashion? Orientalist stereotypes of the veil that characterize the hijab as ugly, oppressive and conforming frame it as antithetical to fashion; likewise, the idea of the hijab as the marker of modesty can also work against mainstream understandings of what is considered fashionable. Contrary to these notions, however, the Islamic fashion industry revolves around the subtle drawing of attention to the veil as a utilitarian, fashion garment in order to paint a new picture of the Muslim woman. These are the questions and ideas that guided my study. By coding the five blogs and looking at the mix of photos, I was able to find that the visual discourse of the blogs revolved around each user uniquely, focusing on the respective fashion and lifestyle choices of each woman. The codes also allowed me to see how each blog, in its own way, perpetuated Western notions of consumerism while simultaneously creating new spaces for identity-making for Muslim women within the online fashion world, in which identity-making relied heavily on taste and branding. This identity-making is what I wish to expand on in future research. The Instagram blogs in this analysis are the groundwork for understanding the ways in which these hijabista women use their position in social media (racially, socially and economically) as opportunities to network and grow, as well as open up spaces for more Muslim women wishing to navigate mainstream fashion.

1.3 Literature Review

With the rise of a ‘new’ Muslim bourgeoisie in the past decades in regards to consumer culture as a response to fashion lines, magazines and brands all marketed specifically to religious buyers, religiosity and consumer practices become increasingly linked, especially in relation to

fashion. The purpose of this research was to gain a broader perspective on how Muslim women have become acclimated to the online fashion market in a way that affects their roles within the Islamic culture industry; to identify how certain products, particularly religious clothing items and accessories, are represented within the online fashion market, specifically visual blogs like Instagram, and thus figuratively and literally sold to Muslim women as fashion items. How these women consume “Islamic fashion” as well as “non-Islamic fashion” (and how they combine the two) is just one aspect of their embodied performances of identity. The ability to negotiate the market as a consumer is a right that many in the West feel obliged to act on in order to ensure their sense of belonging, and Muslim-American women are no exception.

Incorporating a mixture of ‘modern’ style and popular fashion into everyday religious wear has become an almost unconscious act for many Muslim women. What I want to examine is how the Islamic fashion industry is assimilating Muslim women into the online world of fashion and lifestyle blogging and therefore creating a niche market that revolves around a public platform of modest, modern dress. I’m pulling from three different bodies of literature to frame my analysis: the study of orientalism, Islamic fashion studies, and fashion and cultural studies.

1.3.1 Orientalism and Perceptions of Muslim Womanhood

Much of the literature written on Muslim identities, specifically female identities, has looked at stereotypes of Muslim women in the U.S. (Jarmakani 2008) or specific histories of women and feminism in Islamic societies (Mahmood 2005; Badran 2009). The root of my project relies on the socially and politically constructed tensions that fuel my research: the stereotype of the Muslim veil as ugly, oppressive, backward, etc., and the notion that both the hijab and the wearer are epitomes of ‘modesty.’ Both of these notions are rooted in orientalism. The literature expanding on this phenomenon of orientalism is large, but Edward Said’s book,

Orientalism, is the hallmark canonical text for recognizing and addressing Western stereotypes of Middle Eastern culture. The very category of the “oriental” tells us that the epistemological stance of orientalist is flawed. They create a fabricated place, the “Orient,” through their own productions of knowledge about this area, which takes on a set of meanings that then have very material consequences for those living within these regions. According to Said, the “Orient” is a social and political construction, thereby making “anyone who teaches, writes about or researches the Orient... an Orientalist” (Said 1978: 2) and “Orientalism is a style of thought based upon ontological and epistemological distinction made between ‘the Orient’ and (most of the time) ‘the Occident’” (2), or the east and the west. Said uses this text to explain how Europeans used orientalism to define themselves; for every subject needs an ‘other’ to which to compare itself. Problems arise, however, Said states, when generalizations are made about the attributes associated with ‘orientals’ and used as fact to support a certain image of eastern culture in the Westerner’s mind; an image infused with prejudice and dismay. Practices of religious veiling, like the hijab, are a primary example of a generalization that is constructed around orientalist discourses in the West. The prejudice and stigma surrounding veiling highly impacts the ways in which the hijab and other religious veilings need to affectively change to be marketed as fashion items. I expand on affective change in the next chapter, in which I discuss the hijab in the aftermath of the post-9/11 “war on terror” campaign.

In Lila Abu-Lughod’s article, “Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving? Anthropological Reflections on Cultural Relativism and Its Others,” the idea of the ‘western savior’ and ‘messenger’ is addressed in the context of anthropological research and its goals. Abu-Lughod is critical of anthropology’s “complicity in the reification of cultural difference” (Abu-Lughod 2002: 783). Specifically in relation to the veil, she speaks to the U.S. obsession

with ‘understanding’ the “culture” of the Middle East and the women who live there, as if this understanding would give insight to the West’s other favorite obsession, the “war on terror.” Feminist anthropologists are constantly contending with global difference in their research, but Abu-Lughod emphasizes that much of the research done is guilty of a “colonial” rhetoric (“saving Muslim women”) and she offers an alternative. Her approach offers three angles to looking at the politics of “cultural difference,” but it essentially ties back to the fundamental tensions I mention earlier; Abu-Lughod states “we need to work against the reductive interpretation of veiling as the quintessential sign of women’s unfreedom, even if we object to state imposition of this form” as well as not “reducing the diverse situations and attitudes of millions of Muslim women to a single item of clothing” (786).

For this project, the literature covering the politics of orientalism has to be narrowed to focus on orientalist perceptions of the ‘veil,’ or hijab and other related religious wear. Aside from Abu-Lughod, the research focusing on orientalist representations of Muslim womanhood is very large, but in regards to my own research the orientalist literature is narrowed to focus on orientalist discourses surrounding the veil (Hoodfar 1997; Kahf 1999; Shirazi 2001; Amireh 2000); many of these scholars direct their attentions to representations and orientalist perceptions of Muslim personhood, specifically in relation to veiling and dress practices. The scholarship around the political, social and cultural contexts of veiling, all of which impact fashion choices, situates how religious clothing items, especially hijab, were connected to larger notions of modernity, civilization, etc. (Heath 2008; Gole 1996; Scott 2007; El Guindi 1999). Joan Wallach Scott’s book, *The Politics of the Veil*, is a good example of this ‘situating.’ Scott explores the apprehensions, preconceptions and prejudices that fueled the banning of the headscarf in schools in France. Scott frames her analysis of the debate in France as a “sustained

polemic, a political discourse” that heightens the “imagined” conflict between “Islam and the West” (Scott 2007: 9). In her book, she examines the long history of racism behind the imposed headscarf ban in France as well as the obstacles French Muslims face against assimilation. At the heart of Scott’s debate lies the conflicting emotions and approaches to ‘sexuality.’ With the French supporters of the ban upholding sexual ‘openness’ as the standard for normalcy (and also liberation), the ‘sexual modesty’ that revolves around veiling becomes proof that Muslims can ‘never become fully French.’ Through this expose of the history of laws surrounding the veil, Scott, like her peers in the field of orientalism studies and the politics of veiling, addresses many fundamental questions. Are Islamic clothing traditions oppressive to women? Are the societies instituting these clothing practices oppressive to Muslim women? Scott uses her text to break the traditional stereotyping around the hijab and offer up a more critical approach to ideas of oppression and clothing practices within Muslim culture in France.

Still focusing on the orientalist tensions surrounding Islam and women’s subjectivity, another piece of literature that revolves around these same questions is Leila Ahmed’s *Women and Gender in Islam*. In this book, Ahmed takes a more critical perspective to the debate about women and Islam. By examining the historical roots and tracing the discourse of women and gender in Islamic society from the ancient world to the present, Ahmed addresses some fundamental questions that seem to still resonate with Middle Eastern studies today, among these being the “two distinct voices within Islam, and two competing understandings of gender, one expressed in the pragmatic regulations for society ... the other in the articulation of an ethical vision” (Ahmed 1993: 65-66). Particularly looking at the idea of ‘regression progression,’ Ahmed uses this phrase to symbolize the continuing trend of younger generational Muslim women taking up the hijab and other veiling styles in both traditional and non-traditional ways.

Regression progression is a phenomenon that is often seen in recent waves of wrapping and dressing among younger Muslim women, in which the headscarves and tunics are cut in a more traditional style, but still made to look edgy and “modern.” Her more recent book, *A Quiet Revolution*, builds on the earlier exploration of regression progression by investigating the resurgence in the practice of wearing hijab among younger women in the Islamic world. Such resurgence, among a large swath of young Muslim women, certainly contributes to the incorporation of the hijab into fashion and high fashion circles.

1.3.2 The Islamic Culture Industry

There is not much scholarship within orientalist and religious studies that gives accounts of how Muslim women living in a Western society express themselves through dress or how they incorporate their own personal fashion styles into a religious context. The growth of an Islamic consumer society, which is creating specific links between religiosity and fashion and encouraging Muslims to be both “covered and fashionable, modest and beautiful,” is the focus of a small but growing literature (Kilicbay and Binark 2002; Sandicki and Ger 2007; Balasescu 2003; 2007; Abaza 2007; Akou 2007; Gokariksel and Secor 2010; Lewis 2007; 2010). These projects have focused on Muslim women in countries where Islam is one of the leading religions within the culture, and there has not been much work done that focuses on Muslim women who assert their identities as “fashionistas” in an online world. Western fashion has historically and geographically been assigned to “a specific set of dress practices that follow particular conditions of production, distribution, and consumption” (Lewis 2007:435). Often regarded as “rooted in modernity and characterized by rapid changes in style,” Western fashion “self-consciously constructs an identity suitable for the modern stage” (435). What I attempted to do in my analysis of the hijabista fashion community was to disrupt this colonialist way of thinking about

fashion (one that roots itself in Westernized practices) and instead examine how the Islamic culture industry creates new ways of classifying what it means to be a modern woman who is both Muslim and asserting her fashion choices through this “modern stage.” For research purposes, I looked specifically at what I call the online Islamic fashion industry, the branch of the Islamic culture industry that focuses on fashion and clothing practices as presented in online fashion and personal blogs. Within the blogging world of the online Islamic fashion industry, new spaces of marketing and networking are opened up for Muslim women fashion bloggers.

In the *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* issue titled “Marketing Muslim Women” that was mentioned earlier, several authors submitted contributions that revolved around the relation of Muslim women and consumer capitalism. Two essays in particular, along with the journal's introduction, relate specifically to the Islamic culture industry and its effects on Muslim women's agency. The introduction essay, titled “Muslim Women, Consumer Capitalism, and the Islamic Culture Industry” by Banu Gökariksel and Ellen McLarney, begins by outlining what the Islamic culture industry is, how it works within the context of consumer capitalism, and how Muslim women become consumers within a neoliberal Western market. Muslim identities are increasingly constructed through consumption practices that lead to transregional and transnational “Muslim networks” (Gökariksel, McLarney: 2010) and this networking led to the emergence of a market that specifically targeted Muslim women: the Islamic culture industry. While studying the techniques of this particular market, which include advertising and promotion based on twenty-first century ideas of modernity overlaid with traditional Islamic cultural values, I use Gökariksel's and McLarney's framework to examine how images, practices, and ideals of Muslim femininity are produced, circulated, and consumed within an online setting. Branching off from this are two essays from the journal that stand out in particular, “Marketing Muslim

Lifestyle: A New Media Genre” by Reina Lewis and “Between Fashion and Tesettür: Marketing and Consuming Women’s Islamic Dress” by Banu Gökariksel and Anna Secor. Both of these essays examine the role of traditional dress practices in Islam as it contends with modern-day media and the ‘Western styles of fashion’ presented to Muslim females as an alternative to traditional dress. It is understood from the results of both research studies that the element of fashion (in relation to veiling) for Muslim women is bound up in time, or temporal; that is, it markedly changes from generation to generation (Gökariksel and Secor, 2010: 135). Finding room for personal style and interpretation is something many Muslim women are accustomed to doing in their everyday dress, especially considering the fact that compulsion around fashion trends and styles is extremely relevant in the images presented in the Islamic fashion industry’s media channels. Similar to Arabic and Middle Eastern magazines like *Sisters*, *Muslim Girl* and *Alef*, the blogs I use in my research have a community of followers cohered by faith *and* taste. Their class and socio-economic status is often reflected back to them through the images within the blogs. By using textual analysis to examine images within today’s hijabista fashion blogging community, I expanded on the frameworks of Gökariksel, McLarney, Secor and Lewis to understand how these women negotiate visual politics to present an image of what it means to be a ‘fashionable Muslim woman’ with emphasis on taste variation and branding within the online Islamic fashion industry.

In Reina Lewis’ anthology, *Modest Fashion*, she compiles multiple articles by different authors, including herself, into a collection examining the “increasingly visible range of modest dressing being undertaken by women around the world” and how these dress practices correlate with religious ideology and fashion culture. Combining the essays and works of scholars, journalists, fashion designers, and even bloggers, this book evaluates the emergence of a niche

market for modest fashion among and between multiple faith groups as well as secular forms of dress. Lewis's anthology investigates the personal and the political as well as the economic implications of contemporary dress practices among Muslim women, which include the focus on class difference as it relates to pricing, styling and taste. Not only are Muslim women boosting sales as consumers, but they are also the designers, the promoters and the marketers. Lewis's ideas on modesty as a direct relation to class, and not just sexuality, is extremely important in relation to my own analysis. Developing "modest dress" as a niche market, Lewis explains, is actually a way to fuse fashion and faith, but also modesty and class. 'Tasteful' clothing practices change across racial, generational and class lines, which leads the Islamic culture industry to market certain brands as tasteful to certain consumers. Emma Tarlo's book, *Visibly Muslim Fashion, Politics, Faith* is a similar attempt to engage with this same discussion: what does 'modest' fashion entail and how does this affect Muslim women's identities within a political, social and cultural context? Both of these texts offer an analysis of how to engage with the online Islamic fashion industry through community regulation, brand promoting and social media and I take it further by looking specifically at a group of women who characterize themselves as hijabistas, or turbanistas, (both plays on the word fashionista) and how the images and fashion they produce in their blogs visualize and express a certain 'modest' lifestyle that is still rooted in notions of Western consumerism.

1.3.3 *Fashion and Cultural Studies*

Understanding how fashion works within popular culture, particularly within a Western context, is a central theme to this project. There are multiple genealogies within fashion studies, and I am particularly concerned with fashion studies as it overlaps with cultural studies. As the study of everyday life, from the microcosmic to the macrocosmic, cultural studies offers a useful

framework for contextualizing fashion trends. Cultural studies, according to Lawrence Grossberg, arose “when culture became both visibly central and explicitly ambiguous” (Grossberg 2010:173), and the same can be said about fashion studies. Fashion studies is a field that is constantly evolving, but the discipline primarily engages with fashion as a theory in which trends and objects and images become intertwined with cultural waves. Looking to further examine this connection, Susan Kaiser’s *Fashion and Cultural Studies* bridges theory and practice, examining fashion from both a cultural studies and a fashion studies framework. Kaiser addresses the continuous interaction between fashion studies and cultural studies in the research field and she expands in her chapters to explore intersectional and transnational fashion subjects, the class, gender, race and sexuality aspects of fashion, as well as fashion’s role in “popular culture.” With fashion being one of the predominant visual components to following the constant stream of change within popular culture and society, hyper-visibility around bodies in the fashion industry, including fashion bloggers, becomes over-looked as problematic and instead creates new grounds for policing females bodies, particularly women of color.

One of the largest resources for research in fashion and cultural studies is the journal *Fashion Theory*, inaugurated in 1997 (Kaiser 2012:10), as well as *Fashion Practice* and *Critical Studies in Fashion and Beauty* in 2010 (10). Along with these journals, the other key texts on the intersection between fashion studies and cultural studies all address the ways in which boundaries between popular culture and subversive culture become blurred in the online community, as well as how the online community functions as a communicative group. By expanding on these analyses, I created a framework for the hijabista blogging community that allowed me to look at how these bloggers created their own subculture of fashion through their dress practices and interaction with online followers.

In his book, *Understanding Popular Culture*, John Fiske expands on the ways in which cultural artifacts such as jeans, shopping malls, tabloids, and TV all fall into the category of “popular culture.” Popular culture is not concerned with efficiency, but with meaning, pleasure and identity (Fiske 1989:1). By looking into Fiske’s ideas of fashion within popular culture, I expand on his arguments that Western popular fashion is in a constant paradox: the commodification of a particular garment “for everyone” is perpetuating the widely held idea that communal value lies within individualism, which is directly in opposition to mass commodification. One way I incorporate this idea into my research is by looking at how the hijab and other veiling styles exist as a commodity within the fashion blogs. I examine how it is presented in photos and on the women in the photos, how it is styled to suit the theme of the blog, and how it is metaphorically and literally sold through marketing strategies.

Another important text within this discipline is Dick Hebdige’s *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*. Hebdige examines the ways in which the emergence of youth subcultures attract attention from the media and, thus, categorize themselves as ‘apart from the norm.’ A subculture is created when a group within a certain genre of culture (like fashion) creates their own interpretation of the genre, therefore placing themselves as ‘apart’ from the cultural large. Hebdige uses the rise of ‘punk’ and ‘mod’ styles as examples of how fashion culture become fragmented into smaller subcultures in accordance with specific cultural waves and trends. Hebdige’s analysis of how society and the media perform the “critical ideological work of ‘classifying out the world’ within the discourse of dominant ideologies” (Hebdige, 1979: 156) provides me with a way to frame the ideology of ‘subculture’ with cultural studies, fashion studies and modern media. With the ever-increasing attention being placed on the veil in the fashion world, the role of media plays a huge part in my own analysis of the online Islamic

fashion industry and the ways in which certain images and practices are interpreted by both Muslims and non-Muslims as ‘popular.’ Hebdige references Roland Barthes, author of *The Fashion System*, to make sense of how certain styles become popular through signs and meanings. Barthes idea of culture extended into ‘the everyday’ details of life, allowing infinite possibilities for meaning to arise and stick to certain fashions at certain times, such as the rise in popularity of the leather jacket in punk-era London as representing rebellion or the hindering affect of terror that ‘stuck’ to Muslim veiling practices post-9/11 in the United States. In the context of my research, it’s important to keep Hebdige’s and Barthes’ ideas in mind when analyzing the various fashion styles of the women in the blogs and how their ‘hijabista’ persona has become a subculture within the fashion industry.

1.4 Methods

The online Islamic fashion industry is comprised of multiple blog styles, including Instagram accounts, Tumblr accounts, and personal blogs, as well as Zines, retail sites and fashion and beauty tutorial pages. For this project, I’ll looked only at the Instagram accounts of five women, using their accompanying personal blogs as a supplement as needed. I chose only five bloggers specifically because of their range of representations within in a geographical context (Kuwaiti and American), veiling styles, age, and the format of their pages. The five Instagram accounts include @ascia_akf, @yazthespaz89, @velascarves, @dalalid, and @phkidaily. All of these accounts are run by a sole female user, but only one of the blogs, @phkidaily, operates as a contribution-based blog, in which the photos featured are contributed from outside users.

The first part of my data collection consisted of photo content analysis assisted through coding. By looking at 100 consecutive photos from each of the individual accounts, I used

specific codes that I generated to catalog each of the images: full-body shot, selfie, outfit emphasis, presence of others in the photo, advertising/endorsement, lifestyle or tips (food, health, fitness, etc.), and video posts. By categorizing each photo under the appropriate code(s), I used the tallies as data to analyze and create a visual discourse for each blog, determining whether a certain style of Islamic fashion is being promoted. The visual discourse of the blogs then allowed me to have a better idea of how the tensions I discussed in my research questions were being addressed, if at all.

The second part of my analysis was a more in-depth visual comparison of six photos from two of the blogs. By conducting a more comprehensive visual analysis of the photos, I examined how these blogs are set up to create each unique visual discourse. To do this, I looked specifically at the content of the photo (people, clothes, accessories, props, etc.) as well as the visual composition (lighting, background, posing/gaze, etc.). By incorporating a variety of styles, brands and subjects into their blogs, these women are telling their followers and peers in the online Islamic fashion industry that being a fashion-forward Muslim woman is not only acceptable, but doable in today's society (the question remains, doable for whom?)

As I mentioned earlier, my theoretical framework is focused within cultural studies of fashion, and I rely heavily on Said's work on orientalism. Said's work is important to my research because I am constantly checking myself and my work for moments of 'essentializing.' When studying and analyzing these blogs, I don't wish to 'take up' or 'take on' the role of messenger in these women's stories; rather I hope I convey the importance of the Islamic fashion industry within fashion studies and the industry's effects on Islamic consumer culture. The purpose of this research was to take a small sample of blogs from the online Islamic fashion industry and use their content as data to begin to understand the ways hijabista culture

and modest, Muslim clothing is creating a space for itself in the fashion world, particularly the online sector. In 2013, HuffPostUK estimated the Muslim fashion industry to be worth 96 billion dollars and steadily growing. While this trend currently seems to still be functioning as a niche market, the likelihood of it staying that way is slim. Modest fashion with Arab and Islamic influences are becoming more and more sought after by those outside of the Islamic religion, and this can be attributed in part to the dissemination of photos, brands and ‘hype’ that gets circulated in spaces like hijabi fashion blogs. The role that hijabista bloggers play in the Western market is growing and with it, the roles of Muslim women in all parts of the fashion world. By circulating an agenda that frames the veil as a modern, fashion garment, hijabista bloggers disrupt antithetical notions of veiling that arose in the post-9/11 era as a direct construct of the United States’ “war on terror.” These blogs showcase a ‘reality’ that is devoid of sexuality or religiosity (both of which often serve as alienators to society) and instead use branding and taste to display Muslim womanhood as ‘natural’ within the realm of fashion and consumerism.

A new praxis emerges that places veiling and religious covering in a context allows the veil to shed some of its hindering affective ties to terrorism and militant oppression and instead creates a kinship to ‘modernity’ that is more accepting in the public eye. This praxis *is* the Islamic culture industry. The clothing practices of Muslim women reflect the daily negotiations these women face in response to Western society’s demand for ‘naturalness.’ Adopting the veil as a voluntary action on a public platform, like an Instagram account, simultaneously entails submission to certain religious practices while also implying that the subject is an ‘agent’ operating within a space that places value on branding and taste.

2 CHAPTER TWO

2.1 Visual Discourses

For my analysis, I chose to code five Instagram blogs and use the data collected to interpret the ‘visual discourse’ created by each account. The visual discourse represents the messages, ideas, and knowledges that are created and exchanged within the Instagram space. Coding, according to *Reading National Geographic*, “allows [the] discovery of patterns that are too subtle to be visible on casual inspection and protection against an unconscious search through the magazine for only those which confirm one’s initial sense of what the photos say or do” (Lutz et al., 1993: 89). Going into this project, I expected the discourse to revolve around the women’s lives on a surface level (clothes, beauty tips, events, etc.). What I found in the coding of the photos, however, gave me an entirely different sense of the purpose behind the blogs. Not only were specific parts of the women’s lives on public display, but their Instagram accounts became a platform for endorsement, networking and branding. For almost all of the blogs (with the exception of @phkidaily), the visual discourse was strikingly similar in three ways. 1. The photos did not vary in subject and purpose. The user was almost always pictured and with her, a specific brand or event was being endorsed. 2. Emotional realities of the user were always ambiguous. The only specific emotions ever mentioned were positive universal descriptors such as “happy,” “excited,” “tired” (‘tired’ from being ‘excited’ at an event all day, or traveling to another country). Even when these specific emotional states were mentioned, the face pictured was always posing, smiling and seemingly devoid of outside conflict. 3. The veil is always present and used as a marker of religious identity, both implied and direct. While all of the women are veiled consistently in their photos, the veil is in no way universalized through this analysis. The opposite happened, actually, in that a unique visual discourse of the veil emerged

within each blog that surrounded around wrap style, pattern, and material and, of course, the wearer.

These three characteristics implicate the ways in which the blogs frame their “authenticity” through style and taste. I argue later in this chapter that there is no “authentic” way of doing Islamic fashion, yet there seems to be a platform in which each blog situates itself within the online Islamic fashion industry that creates an idea of what it means to be an “authentic hijabista blogger.” Thinking through these similarities through the ideas of authenticity, how then do we think about the visual discourses as a representation of these women’s realities? One could argue that the discourses presented are constructed purely for the social integrity of the blog: an intentional mapping of a pseudo-reality on the part of the blogger for the satisfaction of the viewer. But these realities shift when looked upon through the lens of fashion marketing and branding. These blogs occupy a space that is capable of both reinforcing and resisting traditional (often orientalist) ideas of veiling, yet this same space is embedded within a capitalist logic that reinforces Western narratives of consumerism. For this spatial blurring to happen, the veil becomes something besides the ‘other’ it represented in the immediate post 9/11 aftermath and a new praxis had to emerge that placed veiling and religious covering in a context that ripped away some of the hindering affect left by America’s “War on Terror” and instead replaced it with a kinship to ‘modernity’ that was more accepting in the public eye. I argue in this chapter that the visual discourses of four of the five blogs I coded for my research (the exception being @phkidaily) operate on notions of Western consumerism through personal and product branding, the implications of which I will discuss in the next section. However, all of the blogs create new spaces for identity-making among Muslim women who choose to veil while navigating the Western fashion market.

2.2 Instagram and Branding

Marwa Atik, co-founder and designer of Vela Scarves (Vela is Latin for ‘veil’) based out of southern California, is a self-proclaimed hijabista and promoter of “veiling in style.” She and her sister, Tas (Tasneem)—both in their mid-twenties—have created a thriving company through Vela, but it is more than that. Marwa and Tas have shaped their company through their own personal attitudes and style, making Vela not just a name, but a brand. How does one ‘brand’ themselves, (or create a brand for themselves)? A more pressing question could be, how does one brand an object such as the hijab, which, as a marker of piety, is presumably a neutral garment?

Branding is much more than just assigning a name or face to an object; it requires long term commitment and involvement, high levels of resourcing and also skill. Branding is a mode of product differentiation, in which a product or service is made more attractive to a particular target audience (Kelchner 2015). This differentiation within the market relies heavily on the idea that certain demographics hold particular tastes and values that will set them apart in consumer practices. This variable of taste is crucial within my analysis. By functioning within this narrative of branding that revolves around taste, the blogs in my analysis communicate very specific messages about their place within the online Islamic fashion industry. Brands have permeated every facet of society, from popular culture to religious symbols and everyday activities. In a study released by Julien Cayla and Eric J. Arnould in 2008 on “A Cultural Approach to Branding in the Marketplace,” branding is a “cultural form” (88):

A cultural form is a way of interpreting and organizing the world. Songs, folktales, movies, plays, and even beauty pageants are cultural forms because they encapsulate ideas about the way people should live, look, and think. To talk of

brands as cultural forms is to acknowledge that branding is a specific form of communication. (Cayla, et al. 2008: 88).

So if a brand works as a tool of communication (one that is heavily embedded in capitalist logic), it begs the question of what messages are being communicated. Does the person, institution or corporation behind the brand control the messages being sent and to whom? Do the intended messages and the messages actually received always match up? While branding on a global scale is a dubious task, these questions apply to smaller scale brands, as well, such as personal and ‘homemade’ fashion and lifestyle internet blogs. Regardless of the saturation of the brand into society, certain items are capable of triggering a variety of responses within different cultural contexts (specifically an item such as the hijab or turban, which is heavily stigmatized in post 9/11 American society.) When it comes to the hijab and other veiling styles, cultural context is crucial to understanding the significance of the garment to the wearer. Judging from the visual discourses, it would seem that most of these bloggers use fashion and branding to implicate their place in the ‘modern’ day fashion world: not as Muslims, but as fashion-forward women. In fact, aside from the presence of the veil, their religious affiliations are not brought up at all. Branding is the conscious construction of a self or product (or both) that becomes distinctive through this idea of authenticity, in which an equally constructed sense of style is presented as natural and, therefore, ‘authentic.’ Instagram works as a budding platform for this model and as a form, it particularly lends itself to constructing one’s idea of authenticity by providing a sense of proximity and immediacy.

It’s important to understand that this project is not attempting to analyze the women behind the blogs, but rather the online content and visual discourses created through their blogs. Of the five women I’ve chosen for my research, each have different methods and techniques

when it comes to making, sustaining and ‘branding’ their blogs; but all of them are working within the same niche of the online Islamic fashion industry: Instagram. What makes their Instagram accounts unique from their other subsequent personal blogs is the emphasis Instagram places on visual rather than textual content. Instagram is a space that values a surface-level, optical appreciation, seemingly out of context of both space and time. Released in 2010, this app is a “mobile location-based social network application that offers its users a way to take pictures, apply different manipulation tools (‘filters’) to transform the appearance of an image (for example: fade the image, adjust its contrast and tint, over or under-saturate colors, blur areas to exaggerate a shallow depth of field, add simulated film grain, etc.), and share it instantly with the user’s friends on the application” (Hochman, et al., 2012: 6). The photos and videos uploaded to Instagram can be immediately synced with all of the users’ other social media accounts, and also give ‘followers’ access to the users’ location (depending on the individual privacy settings of the user.) What also sets Instagram apart from other photography blogs is its emphasis on the blogger. The posts on an Instagram account are almost always a reflection of the users’ lifestyle, or rather, how the user wishes to portray their lifestyle. With Instagram acting as a platform for representation, there is often no way of knowing if a direct correlation exists between the visual discourse of the blog and the user’s actual reality. For women who choose to conduct their accounts as fashion and lifestyle blogs, they often operate under no corporate signifier or institution; all of their posts are photographed and presented personally. Unlike websites and other blogs designed to market and sell veils, such as *Modest Street Fashion*, *HijabStyle*, *Style Covered*, or even Marwa and Tas’s .com website, *VelaScarves*, Instagram blogs operating within the Islamic fashion industry are catered to specific demographics depending on the users’ personal tastes.

Business Insider did an investigation into Instagram and how it has grown so popular among social media users and become the go-to platform for online sharing, looking into why brands and aspiring brands are particularly attracted to the app as a marketing tool. Reasons included prestige surrounding the app compared to other social sites, the gender-balance among users, as well as Instagram having the highest amount of active users among phone-based applications and the income-level of Instagram users (Guimaraes 2014). As a data source, Instagram provides a massive amount of content presented on a platform that is available to everyone, although the visual codes of certain blogs suggest a clear distinction among users based on class and taste. The app is seen as a space for innovativeness and creativity; a space where hijabi women looking to enter the online Islamic fashion industry as fashion bloggers have opportunities for networking that may not be afforded to them on other social media sites and online spaces.

By looking specifically at Instagram accounts, I can use these personal images, videos and text as analyzable data. To break it down into an applicable method, there are four variables: the source, the message, the channel, and the receiver. In Instagram spaces, the users are the source, photos and videos are the channels, but the variables up for interpretation are the messages and the receivers.

2.3 The Rise of the ‘Tasteful’ Hijabista as an Affective Response to ‘War on Terror’

As stated earlier, ‘brands’ seem to differentiate themselves from ‘styles’ through their embedment in a capitalist logic, in which branding is based on competition and profit and style revolves more around the ‘idea’ of individual choice. While it is easy to spot similar ‘styles’ across the women’s accounts, their brands are all very different. A style, while often created by an original idea or individual, is something that becomes appealing depending on the individual’s

‘taste’ in response to social realities. In his book, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, Pierre Bourdieu analyzes the ways in which differences arise among cultural disposition and competence through the variety of consumption of cultural goods (Bourdieu 1979: 13). Bourdieu classifies these distinctions as discrepancies accumulated through ‘aesthetic disposition’ (31), which leads to discrepancies in taste. In the previous section, I mention that branding is the conscious construction of a self or product (or both) that becomes distinctive through this idea of authenticity, in which an equally constructed sense of style is presented as natural and, therefore, ‘authentic.’ Both of these ideas, branding and authenticity, are also wrapped up in this notion of taste. If taste arises through social and cultural discrepancies, then it also functions as the underlying socio-cultural assumptions that shape how brands are presented ‘authentically’ to specific audiences.

For the women producing the Instagram photos and, therefore, the visual discourses of the Instagram accounts coded in my research, style is extremely varied but the tastes are embedded in this notion of Muslim-appropriate high fashion, in which everything from the clothes to the food is specifically chosen to create a distinct impression for the bloggers’ Instagram followers. All of the blogs seem to cater to the ‘acquired’ taste of the accompanying hijabista. For example, in Dalal Al Doub’s account, @dalalid, any photo where she is not the subject is often instead focused on her tastes in food and cuisine. Of the hundred photos I coded, seven photos feature a spread of tapas or Dalal sitting at a café, and three photos picture Dalal holding artisan coffee in her hands. In @ascia_akf, five of the hundred feature her taste for tapas food, as well. The photos within the blogs that focused on cuisine and drink all reflected the ‘refined pallet’ the bloggers possessed. Dining was just one way in which taste was featured; all

of the accounts show their ‘taste’ through their clothing and accessory selection, which often include branding endorsement and self-promotion. As Bourdieu states in his analysis:

Objectively and subjectively aesthetic stances adopted in matters like cosmetics, clothing or home decoration are opportunities to experience or assert one’s position in social space, as a rank to be upheld or a distance to be kept. (Bourdieu, 57)

An example of this assertion of one’s position can be seen in Keziah Ridgeway’s @phkidaily account, which caters to bold colors and prints reminiscent of traditional African garb. Dalal’s account, also, has multiple posts featuring the brand Chanel, which seems to constitute the majority of her wardrobe accessories. When the women feature a specific brand of clothing or design in one of their photos, they succumb to the messages of the brand itself. Yet even the style of their clothing, often a mixture of both brand-name items and ‘nameless’ items, evokes a message to the viewer of the position they hold in the online Islamic fashion industry; an inaccessible world that is imposed onto a virtual platform of accessibility, i.e. Instagram. Followers of these accounts are shown a lifestyle of travel and luxury, parties and events, high-end and every-day fashion; all of which continue to reflect the bloggers’ ‘taste’ in the context of social reality. While the role of Instagram is to render the users relatable to their followers, they still set themselves apart. This separation is heightened by the veil: both the quality and style of the material play an important role in the users’ taste. The visual discourses presented to followers reflect the taste of the account holder(s) (Marwa and Tas, Ascia, Dalal, Yaz and Keziah). With their taste and style being scrutinized, the importance of conveying their “authenticity” as a hijabista blogger to their online peers is extremely important.

The hijab itself is extremely interesting when analyzed through Bourdieu's lens of "taste as a distaste" dialogue. Bourdieu states that "In matters of taste, more than anywhere else, all determination is negation; and tastes are perhaps first and foremost distastes... because each taste feels itself to be natural – and so it almost is, being a habitus – which amounts to rejecting others as unnatural and therefore vicious" (Bourdieu, 56). Post 9/11 Western narratives surrounding Muslim women and the veil have revolved around the idea of it being "unnatural." According to Minh-Ha T. Pham in her article "The Right to Fashion in an Age of Terrorism," the post 9/11 campaigns for fashion consumerism emphasized the idea that "fashion emblemizes and enacts multiple neoliberal freedoms, including the freedom to consume and, connected to that, the freedoms of self-expression and self-determination. All these freedoms, Americans were told, were under threat in the age of terror" (Pham, 2011: 386). Examining the 'fashion-as-a-right' discourse, Pham looks at the ways in which American fashion campaigns pitted themselves explicitly against the burqa (and therefore all styles of veiling) as a way of implementing fashion as an 'emblem of democracy' (388). Western perceptions of the burqa are built on "ideological sartorial logic that is rooted in centuries of imperialist knowledge about the depravities of the Orient, often viewed through the lens of the West's fears and fantasies about Oriental women" (388). Pham uses the example of an article from New York Times Magazine in October of 2001, in which the fashion journalist asks readers to "imagine . . . spending a day in the pale blue burkas worn by women under the Taliban in Afghanistan" (388). Assuming that this imagining is impossible for the readers, the journalist continued on to say "The freedom of women and men to express themselves through their dress is a trifle, of course, until it's taken away" (388). Western constructions of the burqa as necessarily contrary to women's freedom enabled the burqa-clad Afghan woman to become a sign of anti-liberal gender and sexual

oppression, therefore supporting the ‘humanitarian’ justification for the war in Afghanistan (389). In fact, constructions of the Muslim veil as outside the domain of freedom, even as a direct contradiction to freedom, made it possible for fashion consumerism campaigns to position the veil against fashion. This affective interplay of *fashion* with *freedom* is one example of the way ideas get ‘stuck’ together in certain moments, in the context of Sara Ahmed’s ‘stickiness’ from her book *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. To imagine fashion as the exemplary *sign* of freedom in the post-9/11 era was one way for fashion production companies to keep their market up during a time of political and economic instability, counteracting the decline in consumer confidence and spending that threatened to seize the market.

With ‘war’ being the cultural metaphor of the U.S. (we wage war on drugs, on AIDS, on poverty, on terror), it is no surprise that in the aftermath of 9/11, we waged war on fashion. All forms of veiling, from the hijab to the burqa, became laden with affective power, both drawing and deterring the viewer’s gaze in prejudice and suspicion. For this to change, the veil had to become something besides the ‘other’ it represented; a new praxis emerged that placed veiling and religious covering in a context that ripped away some of this hindering affect and instead replaced it with a kinship to ‘modernity’ that was more accepting in the public eye. This praxis was and is represented in the Islamic culture industry.

The clothing practices of Muslim women reflect the daily negotiations these women face in response to Western society’s demand for ‘naturalness.’ Adopting the veil as a voluntary action on a public platform, like an Instagram account, simultaneously entails submission to certain religious practices while also implying that the subject is an agent who has the “ability to select an option from a set of alternatives” (Sandicki and Ger, 2010: 30). The account, @velascarves, is a perfect example of this. The subjects shown in most of the photos (usually

Marwa or Tas, the sisters who run the account) display a variety of different Vela scarves, colors and styles, emphasizing the buyers option of ‘choice’ when it comes to veiling, as one would have in any other fashion practice. Muslim female fashion, and, concurrently, Muslim femininity, are increasingly mediated through societal forces and the rise of the online Islamic fashion industry is a direct counteraction to this. Just as Americans were rallying behind fashion as a freedom in the immediate post 9/11 campaigns, so too are Muslim women (like the bloggers in my analysis) pursuing the “fashion-as-a-right” discourse for their own agenda. Muslimah fashion bloggers used their blogs as spaces for reinforcing their identities as shoppers who relied on variety and taste just as much as any other woman.

This discourse, however, I would argue, is taken up in a primarily Western context: Muslim women are navigating the market and engaging the modalities of consumer capitalism (endorsing brands and creating their own) in order to assert their role as “Western consumers” and therefore non-threatening to other Western consumers (White, non-Muslim Americans). Hijabista blogs that cater to Muslim women of all ages are filled with images of women wearing fashionable hijabs, abayas, and other tesseur-style clothes, yet they are displayed not as religious, but as modern, chic, and fashionable. With the ‘threat’ of religion masked by the modern, fashionable style of the model and garment, the affect around the clothes changes. Branding is a logic extremely rooted in Western notions of marketing and capitalism. To brand the veil, you embed the object into those Western contexts. Ridgeway’s account operates on a slightly different field; being African-Americans, they are not necessarily policed in the same way as Kuwaiti bloggers Dalal and Ascia or second-generation Syrian sisters, Marwa and Tas (although they do undergo this stigmatization), but they also face contestation in the question of

their validity as Muslim. I'll talk about his more in the next chapter when I take a closer look at individual photos from @phkidaily.

2.4 Using Taste to Acquire Cultural Capital

There is no 'authentic way of doing' Islamic fashion for Muslim women. To do so would conclude an 'authentic' identity as a Muslim woman, which is directly opposed to late modernity, in which subjects are constantly creating new, hybridized and fragmented ways of identity formation (Blommaert, et al., 2013: 153). Rather, according to a recent study done by Jan Blommaert and Pia Varis, authenticity arises by "blending a variety of semiotic resources, some of which are sufficient ("enough") to produce a particular targeted authentic identity, and consequently enable other to identify us as "authentic" members of social groups within different "micro-hegemonies" (153).

Contemporary identities must be seen as organized as a patchwork of different specific objects and directions of action. The robust hegemonies that appeared to characterize Modernity have been traded for a blending within one individual life project of several *micro-hegemonies* valid in specific segments of life and behavior. ... People can orient towards entirely different logics in different segments of life – one's political views may not entirely correspond to stances taken in domains such as consumption, education or property. (Blommaert, et al., 154).

Specifically looking at the hijabista phenomenon, I draw on Blommaert and Varis' discussion of the "degrees" of authenticity afforded to certain individuals within specific contexts. They explain that the implementation of certain criteria surrounding Muslim fashion allows some individuals to "inevitably" have easier access to these features more than others

(155), “consequently having less difficulty in discoursing about them... by embodying them or by displaying them as part of their ‘habitus’” (155). Labeling and branding are also examples of this, in which X cannot be Y without having Z. To achieve status as a certain “authentic” identity, one must meet a certain level of “enoughness” (156). Within hijabista culture, certain levels of this “enoughness” can be seen as being met through taste and style, but most importantly, through fashion accessibility. The exclusiveness of the events, promotions and brands that these women endorse through the images on their blogs set them apart from the ordinary Muslim fashionista. Four of the five accounts in my analysis, @velascarves, @ascia_akf, @dalalid and @yazthespaz89, created visual discourses that alluded to a level of professionalism and acquired taste that afforded these women the status of someone worth following. By “defining” their views on Islamic fashion, they defined their tastes. As we saw in Bourdieu’s analysis, taste is classed. This leads to the creation of distinct communities of followers for each account based on class and race, and these communities are the “cultural capital” of the online Islamic fashion industry. Specifically for Keziah Ridgeway’s account, @phkidaily asserts its status not through professionalism or acquired taste, but through sisterhood and community contributions based heavily on African-American Muslimah culture. Thinking through these ideas, I now shift focus to four of the five blogs within my research (@yazthespaz89 was not included for this section), examining how they use their blogs and images as branding tools for perpetuating certain ideals of taste, authenticity, femininity and modernity.

2.5 Vela, a Lifestyle

Of the five Instagram blogs analyzed in my data, @velascarves, @ascia_akf and @dalalid (Murwa and Tas, Ascia, Dalal) used their accounts to seemingly ‘brand’ themselves,

either personally or through a product or both. Product branding was the most evident through Marwa and Tas's account, @velascarves. On the actual website, velascarves.com, in the "ABOUT" section, it states that the company was initially created to follow through with the sisters' goal to "bring beautiful, elegant, and affordable veils to women globally" (Velascarves.com). The site goes on to describe the evolution of the company:

Finally, the original idea and passion for finding the perfect veil—regardless of occasion—was being met, and the sisters continue to work feverishly to maintain inventory, as well as consistent new designs, to keep their loyal clients happy. Vela's novelty veils have quickly become a must-have item for the veiled woman around the world, and the company has enjoyed overwhelmingly positive feedback on its veils—as well as passion. (VelaScarves.com)

While the company's website is a space for selling the scarves, the Instagram account is a marketing tool used for promotion of the product and the sisters' lifestyle. Full of photos of Marwa and her friends hanging out at events and traveling to new places, all while modeling the Vela scarves collections, the collage of photos creates an image of Marwa as someone who is social and leading a 'glamorous' lifestyle. The comments made by followers of the account on the photos are almost always full of admiration and praise, for the women, their products and their style. What makes Vela scarves unique from other hijab styles is the material and wrap styles that the company displays. Chiffon, zippers and ruffles are all hallmarks of a Vela scarf, making it "fashionable" and "unique." Marwa stated in an interview with the *LA Times*, "I knew that I wanted to do a zipper scarf, because I knew that zippers were in style" (Abdulrahim 2015). Marwa and Tas knew that to make their company thrive, they had to stay abreast of the latest fashion trends. The photos on their Instagram blog show the girls traveling all over the world to find new material and muses, all while wearing their own designs. Some videos offer tutorials

on how to wrap your Vela scarf, showing the different variations in hijab. The images depict them as stylish, well-traveled women in their twenties, yet they have become so much more through their company. They don't just sell Vela scarves, they *are* Vela. Their lifestyle revolves around their company, their *brand*. Their scarves become a direct reflection of the sisters' tastes through this brand.

2.6 Ascia, the 'Hybrid'

The other Instagram account that has 'branded' itself beyond style is the blog created and run by Ascia Al-Faraj, @ascia_akf. Unlike Marwa and Tas, Ascia didn't brand herself through a product, but through an identity. She and her husband, Ahmad, both run separate Instagram blogs, but they call themselves "The Hybrids," with Ascia specifically labeling herself as a "Hybrid in a Headpiece." Based in Kuwait, both Ascia and her family are of mixed heritage, which lends to the 'hybrid' label. While their website is run by Ascia, as well as the Instagram account I observed in my research, the photos often feature Ascia with her husband or infant son. Their blog states "Ahmad & Ascia are a husband & wife fashion blogging team from beautiful (but teeny-tiny!) Kuwait. Both are of mixed heritage, and thus call themselves "hybrids." This is their personal style photo diary!" (Hybrids.com). While quick to mention their Kuwaiti heritage, the "About Us" sections of all of her online social media accounts fail to mention what other heritages the couple falls under that lead to the "mixed heritage." The 'hybrid' identity therefore remains ambiguous outside of a Kuwaiti context. However, both Ascia and her husband have become well-known in the online fashion world under their label of "The Hybrids" and many hijabi fashion bloggers look to Ascia for style inspiration. Recently, the couple was awarded "Best Blog" at the Arab Social Media Influencers Summit 2015 (*emirates247.com*). Ascia uploaded a photo to her Instagram commemorating the achievement, stating in the caption,

“I’m so humbled and so grateful that YOU all have made this possible. Thank you ALL for your support & belief in me ♥” (Ascia A.K.F., *Instagram*, 3/17/2015).

Ascia’s Instagram is a mirror-account of her website, with more photos and focus on the visual. She uses her posts on Instagram to alert her followers to new activity on the accompanying website. While the Vela Scarves account run by the Atik sisters follows their lives, its primary focus is on the company and the products. Ascia’s account, @ascia_akf, differs from @velascarves in that Ascia is a promoter/endorser of multiple brands and products that she can be seen using as a part of her daily life in the photos. While her account is meant to give a photo-diary style look at fashionable dress, you still see glimpses into her personal life as a mother and wife, as well. Almost every day there is a new post featuring an “OOTD” or “Outfit of the Day.” In the post, she tells her followers the make and design of each piece of clothing and accessory she adorns. The accompanying photo is often a full-body shot of her, posed in some way to accent her garments. Not only does Ascia identify as a hybrid ethnically, but it seems she uses that label as inspiration for her fashion choices. She is always seen wearing her signature turban-style head wrap and her clothes are a colorful mixture of couture and department store items. This high fashion with ‘off-the-rack’ mixture is what makes Ascia’s tastes so paradoxical; she becomes relatable to her followers through her exclaimed excitement over finding an H&M tunic at a discounted sale price, yet she can be seen wearing that tunic while sporting a custom made handbag that is only sold in Bahrain. This ‘mix’ also makes her style extremely unique, especially in the context of her turban and responses to her unique take on Islamic dress are overwhelmingly positive. One hijabi blog, *SisterhoodFash*, featured Ascia in one of their fashion commentaries in 2012, stating “I was looking at her modest looks with scarf, maxi skirt, blazer, turban and it’s actually quite interesting... I started to think about

wearing turban instead of scarf, gotta try it out later on” (sisterhoodfash, *SisterhoodFash.com*). One outside commenter stated, “I love her style the fact that she is very modern but still halal. The turban style isn't new in the west where i live in the UK 90% of the Muslim women know wear the scarf this way. I love the fact that this trend is growing and Muslim women are experimenting with fashion and still keeping it modest” (Miss Dennis-Reid, *SisterhoodFash.com*, August 9 2012). Comments like this are extremely significant in perpetuating the ‘authenticity’ of Ascia’s fashion choices as a Muslim woman, which I will discuss later on in this chapter. Of the five accounts I looked at in my research, Ascia is the only one who chooses to wear her veil in the style of a turban. The turban style of veiling is often seen among men who wear the head-wrap in religious observance, especially Sikhs, as well as Muslim men. With the turban seen as more of a masculine style of covering, and traditionally non-Muslim, the taking up of the style by Muslim women holds substantial power in both the fashion world and the religious world. By upholding the turban as her veiling style of choice, Ascia marks herself as an innovator in the Muslim fashion world.

2.7 Dalal, the Beauty Blogger

The other account that stood out among the rest as far as branding was Dalal Al Doub’s beauty and lifestyle Instagram blog, @dalalid. Like Ascia, Dalal has her own personal blog that mirrors her Instagram account, but she uses her Instagram to keep her followers up to date on her activity. Dalal is a popular Kuwaiti make-up and fashion blogger who has gained more than 542,000 followers on her Instagram and blog websites. Her posts are devoted to a variety of beauty and make-up advice, fashion and personal styling tips, and advertising promos. Like the other accounts in my research, I was able to find Dalal’s account through my own use and interaction with social media, finding @dalalid on Instagram’s ‘popular page.’ Seeing that

@dalalid was a ‘trending’ user who openly identified as a Muslim female who practices veiling, I was intrigued by her account and chose to incorporate her into my thesis research.

Through Dalal’s blog and her Instagram account, @dalalid, her followers can look and browse through her clothes and accessories, and also get make-up and styling tips of their own.

Dalal states in an interview with online magazine, *Khaleejesque*:

My blog reflects my sense of fashion and my love for makeup. I was in love with makeup since I was a kid, watching YouTube tutorials, taking makeup courses and constantly facing the mirror for countless hours creating new makeup styles. With that passion and with practicing, I became really good at applying makeup to myself. After the constant compliments from people asking me to give them makeup courses, I decided to create my blog. (khaleejesque.com).

Khaleejesque is a lifestyle and culture magazine that features expos on “everything new, exciting and beautiful in the Arabian Gulf countries when it comes to the continuously evolving cultural scene” (*khaleejesque.com*). Dalal’s online image seems to be living up to all of these standards, as her Instagram posts often feature her in polished, high-fashion garments, with airbrushed make-up boldly contrasting with her hijab as she travels the world promoting herself as a beauty and fashion blogger.

Like Ascia, Dalal uses her account to promote other brands and products, often make-up and clothes. Oftentimes, her review of certain make-up products and fashion and beauty brands allows her access to certain events and promotions. She has become a well-known name among Kuwaiti hijabis interested in fashion and beauty. In the same interview with *Khaleejesque*, Dalal is asked what her “signature look” is, to which she answers, “I love the classic look that depends on the eyeliner as the main element. Since I constantly change the look of my style, I use a different eyeliner color every time, which is what sets my makeup apart from others”

(*khaleejesque*). What stands out to me about her answer is her take on the word “classic.”

Looking through her photos, you often see her in material of finer make, neutral colors and couture cut; while she often wears pants combined with long overcoats and tunics, it is very reminiscent of traditional Arab robes and abayas. Her reimagining of the word ‘classic’ alludes to an orientalist framing of both modernity and timelessness, with emphasis placed on the dark-lining of the eyes that Dalal uses as her “signature.” Her taste and style also allude to her position in the social hierarchy of Kuwaiti’s elite; many of the brands and stores she mentions in her captions are located and operate out of Kuwait. Taste is important when it comes to Dalal’s followers, as she clearly distinguishes herself through specific fashion and lifestyle choices that could be interpreted as inaccessible based on class and status and this is only reinforced through her promotions of brands and labels that are exclusively available to Kuwaiti’s upper class. As a member of Kuwaiti’s elite, Dalal is held in esteem among her peers as somewhat of an ‘expert’ in all things fashion and beauty; her status allowing her the means to access certain levels of ‘authenticity’ and expertise that others may not have access to. Subtle connections like these are what fuel this analysis of branding as it is intertwined with taste and style; the marketing value of the brand relies heavily on the bloggers presumed taste and how she is able to incorporate it into her style in a way that makes her stand out.

2.8 PHKI and African Head-Wrapping Influences

Keziah Ridgeway is a writer, online blogger, and activist in her late twenties who works on promoting Muslim women and ‘hijabista’ lifestyle while negotiating culture and politics in an online space. Her primary production is an Instagram account, @phkidaily, and Tumblr page, “Philly Hijabis Killing It” which both showcase “fashionably chic Muslimah’s in the Philadelphia area” (About PHKI). While the surface of her blog seems to be purely focused on

fashion, the image and textual dynamics bring in issues of race, class, religion, sexuality and sisterhood. In the ‘about-phki’ section of her blog, Ridgeway states that her goal in creating these spaces was to “help to build bonds of sisterhood throughout the Philadelphia Muslim community and beyond as well as help to create a positive and healthy image of Muslimahs” (About PHKI). With sisterhood being extremely important among Muslim women, especially African American Muslim women where sisterhood has a dual importance along both racial and religious lines, such as community through veiling, Ridgeway’s emphasis on sisterhood is implicated through the discourse surrounding the photos (the encouraging comments and captions, the user-based community that submit photos for the blog, the emphasis on “following” other women within the Philadelphia Black Muslimah Instagram community).

Ridgeway’s account stood out among the rest in its simplicity and ‘unprofessional’ photography. The visual discourse did not focus on Keziah, but a multitude of African-American Muslim women within the Philadelphia area. Each photo features a different self-proclaimed Muslim fashionista in her own environment and designs. The photos are usually cell-phone quality, although some photos seem to have higher megapixel clarity; but the majority of the submissions don’t seem to be taken on a professional DSLR camera, like the photos featured on the other accounts.

In Keziah Ridgeway’s account, @phkidaily, her views and thoughts when it comes to religion, racism, and activism can be seen through the submitted photos of (predominantly) young, Black Muslim girls and their fashion choices. Black Muslim women deal with prejudice on multiple levels and wish to address all of them at the same time in their activism, similar to the Black feminist theorists often discussed at the core of the feminist movement, like Combahee River Collective and Audre Lorde. While many of the issues surrounding Black female

subjectivity revolve around race, gender and sexuality (the triple threat), Black Muslimahs deal with all of these as well as religion, specifically with Islam being such a stigmatized and targeted religion in the U.S. Various styles of head-wraps have served as coverings for Africans, mostly women, since before slavery, but the history of slavery and the head wrap is crucial for understanding the significance of the covering. According to a PBS exposé on American slavery and gender, the slaves' head-wraps were a sign of 'subordination' to their white masters, yet embellishment of the hair and head was a central component of dress in various parts of Africa, particularly West Africa (PBS).

From the time European fabrics were made available to them, African women wore head-wraps similar to those worn by their enslaved counterparts in America. For these women, the wrap, which varied in form from region to region, signified communal identity. At the same time, the particular appearance of an individual head-wrap was an expression of personal identity (PBS).

For Black Muslim women, like their African ancestors and non-enslaved comrades, the head-wrap functions as a sign of community among the females. The act of veiling functioned the same way among female slaves, as well; they all shared this dominating marker, yet each woman wore it uniquely (PBS).

Veiling in Islam is usually reduced to the primary marker of covering, the hijab. In the English language, hijab has become congruous with all styles of veiling but the traditional image of hijab is sleek, usually consisting of one or two pieces of cloth that wrap tightly around the head and neck, leaving only the face visible. More modern styles of veiling within Islam include the turban style of covering, as can be seen in Ascia's blog images, which pulls heavily from African-American styles of head-wrapping. Helen Griebel states in her essay, "The African

American Woman's Headwrap: Unwinding the Symbols,” that the turban style often differs from more traditional styles of veiling in that

A woman of African ancestry folds the fabric into a rectilinear shape rather than into a triangle. The most significant difference between the Euro- American and Afro-centric manner of styling the cloth is that rather than tying the knot under her chin, the African American woman usually ties the knots somewhere on the crown of her head, either at the top or on the sides, often tucking the ends into the wrap. (Griebel).

This image can be seen in blogs dedicated to head-wrapping among Black women who do and do not identify as Muslim, Ridgeway’s @phkidaily being one of them. The style is meant to hold meaning beyond religious influence. Griebel goes on in her essay to state,

The African American headwrap thus works as a regal coronet, drawing the onlooker's gaze up, rather than down. In effect, African and African American women wear the headwrap as a queen might wear a crown. In this way the headwrap corresponds to African and African American women's manner of hair styling, wherein the hair is pulled so as to expose the forehead and is often drawn to a heightened mass on top of the head. In striking comparison, the scarf worn by white women emulates the way in which the hair of people of European ancestry naturally grows: falling downward and often arranged to cover the forehead. (Griebel).

Much of community created around head-wrapping seems to be a ‘homegrown’ feminism, which is about finding your history and making it valid. It is dangerous, however, to rely only on the binary of known/unknown histories, as one must always be prepared for new realities to emerge.

In an online article on *al-Arabiya.net* titled “Under Wraps: style savvy Muslim women turn to turbans,” author Shounaz Meky provides a commentary on the seemingly recent trend of turban-styled veiling among young Muslim women.

‘The new ways of wearing the hijab is becoming a new global phenomenon,’

Lezley George, professor of fashion at the Heriot Watt University in Dubai, told

Al Arabiya News. It combines the desire to look Muslim and appear more

fashionable, George added. (Meky, al-Arabiya News)

Meky goes on to list the “more practical” reasons for wearing the turban, including weather, temperature and veiling diversity, calling the practice “fashion savvy” and “less typical” (al-Arabiya News). Meky also touches on the critiques of the turban in terms of modesty, but only briefly, warning the readers that some may criticize the choice of the turban for being too revealing, but that everyone has a different view of modesty (Meky). She ends her article on a positive disclaimer, urging her readers to adjust their veils to their own personal preference, which is doable with the versatile style of the turban (Meky).

3 CHAPTER THREE

3.1 Textual Analysis of Photos from @dalalid and @phkidaily

At the beginning of this paper, I gave a detailed description of a portrait of Ascia for *Athnain* magazine, in which she can be seen posing dramatically in all black. When contrasted with her usual photos found on her blog, Ascia is crafted as the epitome of dynamic Islamic fashion. This dynamic fashion aspect can be seen in most of the Instagram accounts in this analysis. But the visual codes of these hijabistas’ blogs are just one aspect of their message. Each photo holds its own meaning within the blog; it is both separate and also part of a whole. In this chapter, I look at six photos, four from Dalal Al Doub’s Instagram account and

two from Ridgeway's PHKIDaily Instagram account. Each photo was chosen based on its content and context within the visual discourse of the blog as a whole; the messages both within the photo and outside of it (captions and comments) creating its meaning. Through this photo-content analysis, I hope to reiterate my arguments from the previous chapter: that the visual discourse of each blog perpetuates Western notions of consumerism while also creating new spaces of identity-making for Muslim women within the online fashion world. I chose to focus on Dalal and Keziah's accounts because they both cover the range of discourses that can be seen in all five of the blogs. Dalal's Instagram account is extremely similar in codes to @ascia_akf, @velascarves, and @yazthespaz89, so I'll look at the variety within Dalal's blog to account for the similar codes for the other three blogs. Ridgeway's blog stood out from the rest in its collage, user contributed style and low quality photography, so I'll focus on two of the photos from this blog to account for this discourse.

3.2 Why This Method?

As an outsider of both the Muslim community and the 'high-end fashionista' community, what I deem to be 'truthful' is subject to contestation. Methodology within social research, particularly feminist methodology, is first and foremost concerned with knowledge making (Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2009: 9) and challenging traditional masculinist and colonialist assumptions about authority. This is problematic in that researchers and subjects are not a unified category; they are divided by real relations of "racialized power, heterosexism, globalization or ablebodiedism" (75). As such, the data relayed in this chapter is relative to my own interpretation of the messages within Dalal's (and the other bloggers') accounts. While often falling into capitalist narratives of marketing and consumerism, I do believe that the hijabista bloggers in my research are creating new spaces of identity for Muslim women

negotiating the Western market. Looking at Dalal specifically in these four photos, her class and wealth have extreme influences on this ability; she can travel across the globe for her job and shop in higher-end retail stores and this is not the case for every Muslim female that is viewing her blogs.

3.3 @dalalid

Scrolling through Dalal al Doub's Instagram page, you'll see mostly images of her: pictures of her posing on the street with her handbags, pictures of her sitting down and drinking coffee at a café, endorsing events and making appearances at parties, or selfie-style pictures promoting a new blog post featuring her make-up tips. The most common image, however, is usually a full-body shot of Dalal in a well-lit, outdoor setting in which the viewer has a clear shot of her entire outfit and accessories. While the photo is clearly staged, the movement of Dalal and her garments is often posed in ways to make the shot look 'candid.' While I coded 100 photos from Dalal's Instagram account, I will look explicitly at four for this analysis. Pictures D1-D4 are screenshots of photos from @dalalid. For each photo, I will give you a brief description followed by analysis of the composition and content. Composition and content are concerned not with the obvious visualizations, but rather the visual elements and the meaning behind particular arrangement of those elements.

Picture D1 shows Dalal in London, standing/posing in front of a full graffiti painted wall. Dalal states in her caption: "London graffiti 🚶🚶 Photo by [@aldoub](#) 🚶🚶" (Picture D1). She is shown wearing cream-colored vest over a white, long-sleeved blouse with dark, skinny-legged pants and dark, closed-toe shoes. Dalal is also wearing her hijab in a tan, satin fabric. The graffiti in the backdrop is a stark contrast to her outfit. Green, white and black colors take the shape of bold, crude, cartoon-ish figures depicting acts of spray-painting and fandom

drawings. The figures of the walking-man-emoticon shown in the caption, along with Dalal's direction in the picture, seem to allude to Dalal 'walking' down the streets of London and past this graffiti wall.

The texture in this photo is much more 'rough' than many of Dalal's other photos. The bold colors of green, black and white distorted into exaggerated and slightly grotesque images on the graphitized wall provide a stark contrast to Dalal's soft colors and immobilized gaze. While she alludes to walking and moving through her leg positioning, her movements almost seem lost in comparison with abstract curves, lines and images of the wall behind her. Combined with Dalal's gaze (as directed away from both the camera and the graffiti), she seems to reinforce the message that she is not a part of this particular London, grunge-graffiti scene. This separation seems reminiscent of the larger visual discourse, in which Dalal's lifestyle is one that is inaccessible to her followers. This inaccessibility is a reminder of the class distinctions that continuously show up in accounts like Dalal's and Ascia's and the Atik sisters'. Despite the fact that photos on Instagram seem to reside in the "class-less, race-less and even gender-less world of cyberspace" (Moore 2012), the content of the photo is still capable of what Eszter Hargittai deems "perpetuating digital inequality" (Hargittai 2008). In her essay, "The Digital Reproduction of Inequality," Hargittai expands on the ways in which digital inequality encapsulates "a more refined approach [that] considers different aspects of the divide, focusing on such details as quality of equipment, autonomy of use, the presence of social support networks, experience and user skills, in addition to differences in types of uses" (Hargittai 2008: 937). Dalal and Ascia and the Atik sisters use their accounts as more than just fashion platforms; they use their accounts to document their travels. Foreign travel, one could argue, is one element of Bourdieu's characterization of "attributes attached by status" (Bourdieu 1984: 26).

Picture D2 is a collage of three images pieced into one photo. One image shows a close-up of Dalal standing behind a display-case of jewelry. In this image she is smiling and wearing all white with a neutral colored hijab. The other two images in the photo are of her arms/wrists, wearing bracelets made by the designer being advertised. The caption reads: “I went to [@boutiqueblackpearl](#) They have an awesome jewelry collection 😊❤️❏🌟 [@boutiqueblackpearl](#)” (Picture D2).

The contrast of sharpness and focus within each of the three photos in the collage alludes to the viewer that while Dalal is promoting a specific product, she still remains the primary subject of the photo. In the largest of the three photos, Dalal smiles back at the camera from behind a jewelry case, everything blurred but her own face. The other photos rely on sharp angles and bright lighting to bring attention to the products. The repetition of photos that happens in the collage style help create a pattern that reinforces a specific point. It would seem here that Dalal is making a statement about the quality of products she chooses to endorse, framing each photo individually and giving the product emphasis. By giving her followers a view of both her and the product together through the collage composition, she reinforces the notion that *she* is responsible for creating influence around the fashion choices of her followers. Once again, this particular photo brings us back to Bourdieu’s notions of taste and why certain tastes are deemed more “socially acceptable” than others. Like I state in the previous chapter, Dalal is held in esteem among her peers as somewhat of an ‘expert’ in all things fashion and beauty; her status allowing her the means to access certain levels of ‘authenticity’ and expertise that others may not have access to. Her advice when it comes to particular make-up brands is especially influential, as she sports a separate YouTube blog devoted solely to make-up tutorials that has over 225,100 subscribers.

Picture D3 is a close-up, ‘selfie’ of Dalal that looks to be taken in a car. She is wearing a black sweater, a bold, diamond necklace, and a dark tan hijab. She is also wearing sunglasses and the caption reads: “Hello Kuwait! ❤️👌 And finally I got #Chanel shades ❤️👌 Thanks to London” (Picture D3). The “selfie” is one of the most prolific trends among social media user activity. AlJazeera America states in one of its expos that “digital self-portraits are the hottest form of social currency” (Keller, america.aljazeera.com). This idea of “social currency” is intrinsically linked to cultural and social tastes and it becomes clear to any viewer that to run a ‘proper’ fashion blog, one must have currency (self-portraits/selfies) in abundance. But what can we learn from them? “Some social psychologists read serious meaning into the selfie, seeing it as a positive mode of identity formation and an important way of presenting and reinforcing a personal image on the Web’s vast social stage” (Keller). Dalal posts selfies consistently throughout her Instagram, operating as both the subject and the photographer in these moments. By controlling the angle, lighting and direction of the camera, as well as her own image, the “selfie” allows Dalal complete control over the image she produces. This control also provides a level of intimacy between her and her followers; there is no middle-man photographer, just Dalal. In Picture D3, the casual setting of the car, the informal lean of her head on her hand all give the impression of a relatable character. Yet this is starkly contrasted with her caption, in which Dalal is quick to mention the designer brand of her sunglasses that she acquired on her travels. The caption shatters the allusion of accessibility for many of her followers who can’t afford the ‘Chanel brand sunglasses from London.’

Picture D4 is full-body shot of Dalal standing on what looks like a side-walk of an indoor/outdoor street mall. Looking down and posing, Dalal is wearing a striped tunic with black pants and tan shoes, combined with a white hijab and pearls. She is also carrying a blue

handbag and seems to be ‘twirling’ her tunic. The caption for this photo states: “Laughter is the sound of the soul dancing” 😊🌀😊 Details: Top: #Kenzo Pants: #zara Shoes: Russell and Bromley London Bag: #reedkrakoff Photo by [@bo_s3yeeed](#) 🌀😊” (Picture D4). This is a typical Instagram post for someone like Dalal (and the other hijabistas). An “OOTD” or “Outfit of the Day” is a post in which the user gives details on all of the garments and accessories that are pictured. In this picture, the movement and focal contrast really accentuate Dalal as the focus. With what seems like a blurred, white city-walk behind her, Dalal’s outfit seems to take up the entire shot; her large striped-tunic blowing in the wind, or maybe a twirl. This “OOTD” style photo is one that can be seen in all of the blogs at some point, including @phkidaily. By referencing the specific brands or garments featured, the subject is deemed more relatable as a shopper. This goes back to my argument in the previous chapter on making the Muslim woman who veils more “acceptable” under public scrutiny when it comes to fashion. The veil in the “OOTD” photos is not the main feature. In fact, the user almost never mentions an outside source for the veil. Instead, the captions often focus on the shirt, skirt, tunic, dress, shoes or accessories the subject adorns. *These* are the items of ‘value’ when it comes to asserting one’s role as a fashionista; the veil becomes almost a side note, a small part of the “overall experience” that the outfit (and the brands that make the outfit) provides.

In all of the photos, the lighting around Dalal and the background is very bright, giving off a “light” mood. Being that Dalal’s account is a lifestyle, beauty and fashion blog, the clothes in all of the photos are all extremely tailored and seem to be made of quality material, which lets her followers know that Dalal takes pride in the kinds of clothes she wears. Besides the *look* of the clothes in the pictures, she also mentions the brand names of her clothes and accessories in her captions. In Picture D2, she mentions the boutique she buys her jewelry from, and in Picture

D3 she specifically states that her sunglasses are Chanel. Picture D4 is an example of what most of her photos on Instagram are like. Full-body shots with descriptions in the captions of the brands she is wearing. In the picture shown in this paper, the brands/designers she mentions are Kenzo, Zara, Russell and Bromley London, and Reed Krakoff; all of which are priced higher than average department store brands. Besides the clothes, I also took direct notice to the captions. In Picture D1 and Picture D3, she mentions her travels to and from Kuwait and London. In other photos on her site, she also tags that she is in Dubai or Paris. Besides the locations, she uses a lot of her captions for promoting certain events she attends: fashion and beauty expos, designer shows, product and store launching parties, etc.

Thinking back on my research questions, I can easily see how Dalal's Instagram (as well as Ascia's, Tas and Marwa's and Yaz's blogs) promotes a certain image of femininity and class. With the practice of veiling becoming more stigmatized in the West post 9/11 (Pham, 2010), blogs like Dalal's reimagine the ways in which Muslim femininity is perpetuated in Western discourse. This can be thought of in the context of Dwight Conquergood's idea of performance studies, in which the moments of everyday practice subvert the imperialist project while exceeding the verbal (Conquergood, 2002: 147). While it's important to note that fashion blogs like Dalal's subvert this "everyday" narrative through the deliberateness of photos, staged "everyday" moments can still be seen in Dalal's photos: walking down the street, going to a jewelry store, taking a photo. The subject in the photos (Dalal) is performing her gender and class in way that seems like "the everyday norm" but is actually carrying out a specific purpose of reimagining. Looking at Dalal's photos, many viewers will no longer see the hijab as exotic compared to Western fashion, but rather as a 'modern' fashion item. This is also helped by the class factors I mentioned earlier in her photo analysis; Dalal's status as a Kuwaiti elite gives her

more access to the fashion world, as well as being taken seriously within this industry. This brings us back to Blommaert's and Varis's ideas of authenticity as "degrees" of "enoughness" mentioned in the previous chapter. While Dalal, and the other hijabista bloggers that fall into her same blogging style and visual discourse, uses her account and photos to perpetuate new ways of reimagining Muslim femininity, it must also be taken into account the way in which her class and status allow her to do so in ways that may not be afforded to other bloggers.

Dalal, and the other bloggers, reinforce their religious identity through the veil, even though religious affiliation is never specifically mentioned in her captions. Dalal, like the others, is not fully embracing either world but, rather, creating a new one that exists in a space of political possibility. The Islamic culture industry uses these online spaces to reinforce its validity in the secular, fashion world. You see this same type of reimagining performance in most of the other hijabista accounts in this analysis, as well. All of these blogs (@ascia_akf, @velascarves, and @yazthespaz89) use high-quality images to display dominant codes of femininity, class and power, but operate these themes within the realm of traditional Muslim dress discourses. Dalal's account is extremely representative of a space that, while having the seemingly paradoxical elements of piety and fashion, is still operating within a very classed framework. A much better example of this reimagining can be seen in Keziah Ridgeway's account, @phkidaily.

3.4 @phkidaily

Like I mentioned in the previous chapter, Ridgeway's account stood out among the rest in its simplicity and 'unprofessional' photography. The visual discourse of @phkidaily revolved around the idea of community and 'homegrown' feminism, featuring a different Philadelphia-area Muslimah in every photo, along with links or tags to their subsequent personal Instagram

account or page. Wearing their own designs or a mix of different department store brands, the women are never displayed in the same outfit, style or color pattern twice. The two photos I examine from @phkidaily both display the dynamics of Ridgeway's own personal style.

These two photos were chosen because of their reflectiveness of the blog as a whole. While Ridgeway appears in photos every now and then, the majority of photos come from and feature outside users. Ordinary backdrop (no sets or special events), sometimes filtered through a collage application (either mirror-grid style or collage style), and partnered with powerful and encouraging words, in either the caption or the photo, are what the followers of @phkidaily see in the daily posts. While the visual discourse of the four other blogs in my research held similar codes and themes, Ridgeway's @phkidaily stood out in its reimagining of what it means to be a fashion-forward Muslim woman. Rather than striving for authenticity through social status, endorsements or product branding, @phkidaily showcases individual and personal styles that create a 'collective' of Black, Muslimah identities; to be featured on Ridgeway's account alludes to a sense of belonging among her followers

Picture R1 is a "mirror-grid" image of a Black woman standing in a parking lot corner against a backdrop of greenery and shrubs. The woman, who is tagged as @a.k.designs, is clad in a royal blue maxi skirt, a red cardigan, white heels and a white hijab that flows over her chest and into a belt. (The colors @a.k.designs sports in this shot are blatantly nationalistic. The intention behind this is left to question, however.) She poses with one ankle crossing the other, her hand on her hip as she gazes away from the camera. With the addition of the mirror-grid feature, in which the original photo is doubled, as if 'reflected' in a mirror, the word "QUEEN" is written in bold letters down the middle (or split) of the photo. Ridgeway writes in the caption, "#Queen indeed! Love the royal blue rocked by @a.k.designs! Looking good sis! #philly

#phillymuslimahs #phillyhijabis #hijabis #phki #phkidaily #hijabinista #instagram #instafashion #instastyle #fashion #style #hijabinspiration #hijablovee #ootd #blog #modestfashionmovement #modestfashion” (@phkidaily, Picture R1).

This photo was chosen for a number of reasons, first and foremost being its composition in relation to the blog as a whole. The mirror-grid or ‘multiples’ feature is used in almost all of @phkidaily’s posts. This is most likely due to the free cell-phone apps, like Photo Grid or PicStitch, that allow users to edit their own photos on their phones. Another reason this photo was chosen was because of the language used by Ridgeway in reference to the subject in the photo. It’s unknown whether Ridgeway herself edited the photo and added the word QUEEN down the middle or if the user who contributed the photo did, but either way the message is clear: African-American hijabis are ‘queens’ of their fashion choices. The word ‘QUEEN’ itself also could allude to a historical connection to African queens, priestesses and warriors of pre-colonial eras. The mega-pixel quality of the photo is average, but the viewer can still clearly see the subject, @a.k.designs, in her outfit, gazing away from the camera. With the addition of the mirror-grid feature, it almost seems as if @a.k.designs is looking at herself in an actual mirror. The split line of the photo is parallel to the borders, but the image itself is almost at an angle, giving @a.k.designs a slight tilt. This is not the style of photo one would see on a blog like Dalal’s or Ascia’s. Rather, this type of ‘DIY’ editing and quality are hallmarks of @phkidaily. It is also this ‘DIY’ style that adds to @phkidaily’s community collective. The followers of this account can see that the photos presented are their own and they have more incentive to dress like the subject and submit their own photos to be featured.

In Picture R2, a woman is seen taking a “mirror-selfie” in a fitting-room like setting. She wears acid washed skinny jeans, black flats, a blue tunic under a black leather jacket and a bright

purple, Aztec-print hijab. You see the presence of other clothes in the edge of the photo, alluding to her being in the middle of shopping. Ridgeway captions the photo with, “@itsmaryamazing says when life gives you lemons... you do retail therapy 🙌🙌🙌🙌 agreed! Lovely per usual! #repost #philly #phillymuslimahs #phillyhijabis #hijabis #phki #phkidaily #hijabinista #instagram #instafashion #instastyle #fashion #style #hijabinspiration #hijablovee #ootd #blog #modeststreetfashion” (@phkidaily, Picture R2).

This photo is somewhat more fitting with the visual discourses of the other four blogs, but the quality of the photo and the outside-user contribution make it a @phkidaily photo. The focus of the camera is universal throughout the photo (no blurred backgrounds) and subject of the picture, @itsmaryamazing, is reflected doubly to the viewers, through both a fitting-room mirror as well as her phone’s camera. The colors in the photo are darker than often seen in the photos of the other four blogs. This is reflected mostly in the clothes, the make-up and the lighting. A photo like this, if pictured in Dalal or Ascia’s accounts, would also most likely be accompanied by a detailed caption of where the subject was shopping or what the specific garments bought were. But in this photo, the focus seems to be less on the outfit and more on the woman wearing the outfit. What the female subject is wearing seems less important than the fact she is wearing them. ‘She’ does not channel her power through her brand-named clothes or social class, but rather through her community and religious affiliation that she can then channel into her clothes. By being in a shopping setting (a fitting room), @itsmaryamazing is also reiterating the argument made in the previous chapter: that aside from the post-9/11 “war on terror/fashion,” she is an active participant in the Islamic fashion industry and a consumer, a “shopper,” just like any other American-teenage girl. However, being that @phkidaily is an account run by an African-American woman and features primarily African-American women,

they are not necessarily scrutinized in the same way as Kuwaiti bloggers Dalal and Ascia or second-generation Syrian sisters, Marwa and Tas. These photos are also reflective of the how @phkidaily uses its visual discourse to address a different kind of policing than the other four blogs; African-American Muslimahs and hijabistas are operating from a different plane of the racial/societal landscape than Middle Eastern or Arab hijabis. Being African-American, their stigmatization differed in certain contexts from the ways Arab or Middle Eastern women were in policed America post-9/11. They were not working to assert their roles as Western consumers. Instead, these women were, and still are, working to assert their roles as Muslimahs. More than that, they are working to assert their roles as Muslimahs who are contenders on the fashion blogging sphere. In a way, @phkidaily functions as a kind of “subculture” that resonates with Dick Hebdige’s definition. If a subculture is created when a group within a certain genre of culture (like Islamic fashion) creates their own interpretation of the genre (bold prints and colors), they then place themselves ‘apart’ from the cultural large. Ridgeway states in a piece she wrote for *Muslim ARC*, that a “hierarchy of desirability” exists among hijabista culture that affects mostly the African American bloggers. While the women featured in @phkidaily’s posts are an equal mix of hijab and turban veiling styles, you can see the ways in which the African-American style of turban head wrapping has already been co-opted by mainstream Islamic fashion (i.e. Ascia) and in that process, becomes more attractive to the hijabista consumer.

4 CONCLUSION

Within the blogging world of the online Islamic fashion industry, new spaces of marketing and networking are opened up for Muslim women fashion bloggers. One of the most proliferated platforms within this industry is Instagram. Coveted for its accessibility and ability to provide mass-networking opportunities, this application allows its users to access a space that

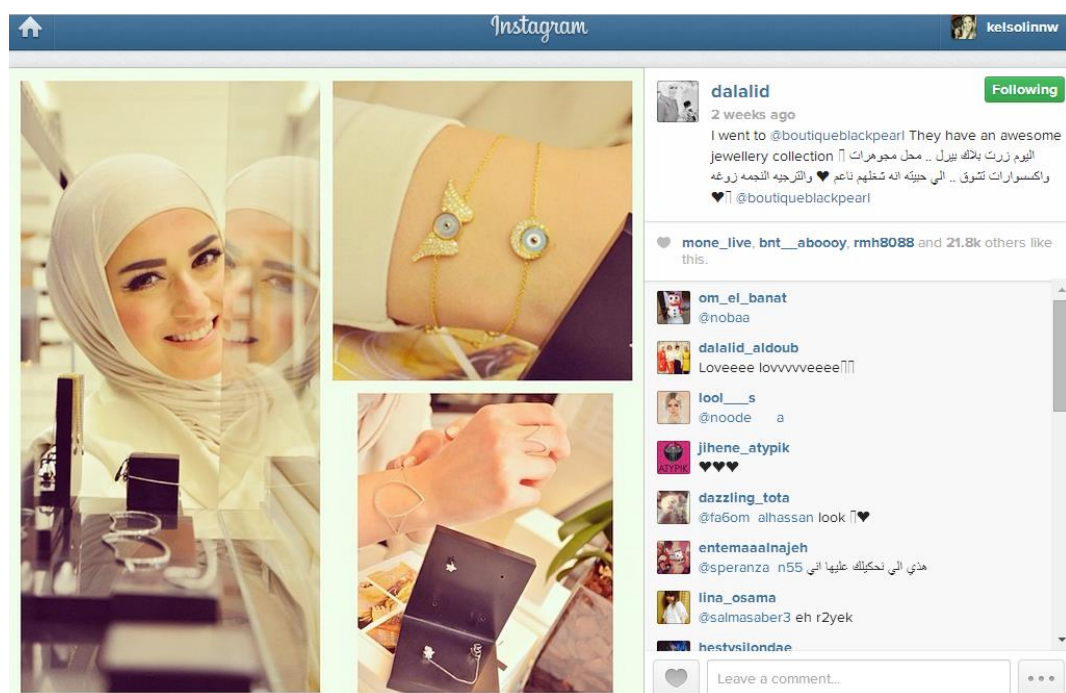
opens up new channels for identity-making, specifically among marginalized groups. In this identity-making process, branding becomes the conscious construction of a self or product (or both) that becomes distinctive through this idea of authenticity, in which an equally constructed sense of style is presented as natural and, therefore, ‘authentic.’ Both of these ideas, branding and authenticity, are also wrapped up in this notion of taste. If taste arises through social and cultural discrepancies, then it also functions as the underlying socio-cultural assumptions that shape how brands are presented ‘authentically’ to specific audiences on the platform of Instagram through Western notions of consumerism.

The biggest anomaly of this research is the turban and its history and appropriation into hijabista culture. I would be interested to investigate further in future research the ways in which the turban has continued to immerse itself as the “new” chic style of veiling among younger, generation Muslim women. As I’ve stated multiple times, there is no ‘authentic’ way of doing Islamic fashion, but it’s interesting how certain veiling styles have been taken up generationally as ‘modern’ fashion changes. My original research questions led me to a project that revolved around this idea of visual discourse and hijabista blogger culture. In the future, I hope to continue this research and focus instead on the women behind the blogs themselves. How are *they* pursuing a lifestyle of ‘modesty’ as self-proclaimed hijabista and what are the motives behind their fashion choices as it relates to marketing and branding? By coding the five blogs, I was able to find that the visual discourse of the blogs revolved around each user uniquely, focusing on the respective fashion and lifestyle choices of each woman. Hopefully, I can use this research as a foundation for future analysis into hijabista culture and its place in the Islamic culture industry.

Figures



Picture D1



Picture D2



Picture D3



Picture D4



Picture R1



Picture R2

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